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SUBJECT: MAJOR COLOMBIAN PRINT MEDIA TRENDS FALL 2003

REFTEL: 1) BOGOTA 03026, 2) BOGOTA 05259, 3) BOGOTA 08486

1. This report on Colombian media covers the period September - November 2003. In this time frame, major Colombian print media (dailies El Tiempo, El Nuevo Siglo, La Republica, and Portafolio, and weeklies El Espectador, Semana, and Cambio) published 88 editorials, op-eds, and other signed commentaries concerning USG policy or leading bilateral issues. Of these, 54 were positive or supportive of USG policies, and 34 were negative.

U.S. Military Assistance to Colombia

2. No articles dealt specifically with the topic of U.S. Military assistance to Colombia.

Eradication/illicit crop spraying

3. In this time frame, 5 articles dealt with the topic of eradication, aerial eradication, or glyphosate use. Two were positive and three were negative.

The favorably disposed articles asserted that:

-The agrochemicals used in coca growing cause more harm than glyphosate.

-It is important to continue aerial eradication efforts at the border with Venezuela, especially in the area of La Gabarra.

Negatively disposed articles asserted that:

-The NGOs will continue to criticize President Uribe for not protecting the environment as long as he insists on using glyphosate.

-By naming the previous Plan Colombia Coordinator Sandra Suarez as Minister of Environment, President Uribe sent the wrong message to environmentalists, who oppose to glyphosate use.

-Glyphosate harms the jungle even more than other areas. More education on protecting nature is needed, rather than continued use of glyphosate.

Plan Colombia

4. In this time frame, no articles dealt with the topic of Plan Colombia and its results in either way.

Trade issues

5. There were 28 articles on trade issues, including regional issues, FTAA, and FTA. Twenty were positive and eight were negative.

Positively disposed articles asserted that:

-Colombia proposes negotiating an FTA without unfounded pretensions or expectations.

-It is important to Colombia to maintain its share in global markets. Opening up access to the U.S. market will help Colombia improve its competitiveness to do so.

-Colombian businessmen, industrialists, and traders must change. They must undertake the challenge of entering the U.S. market and view the U.S. as their ally.

-The talks on services under the FTA, which some in Colombia perceive as something imposed by the U.S., will actually benefit Colombia.

-With the WTO in hibernation, FTAA in intensive care, MERCOSUR in trouble, and an Andean Community Group without Venezuelan participation, bilateral trade relations with the U.S. are back, hopefully for the better.

-Dealing with both FTAA and FTA at the same time requires Colombia to have a well-structured strategy that includes a good knowledge of our strengths and weaknesses, as well as our priorities.

-Reaching an agreement between the Colombian Government, Congress, and the business community is crucial for defining Colombia's position at the trade talks on an FTA with the U.S.

-Transcendental, historic, unprecedented, good news... is the announcement by the U.S. Government of its intention to initiate trade talks for a Free Trade Agreement with Andean nations. This is the biggest trade success of the current Colombian Government. It is important to have the full participation of the Colombian private sector in the talks.

-By including agricultural issues in FTA negotiations, both nations have a lot to gain. Negotiations ought to allow a transition period for sensitive products. Subsidies ought to be lifted gradually.

-Reaching a free trade agreement with the U.S. is a priority for Colombia's trade policy, as is working to improve respect for contracts and intellectual property rights, and speeding up the paperwork and reducing expenses for investors.

-It is important that Colombia stay calm and continue working with developed nations to reach a favorable agreement regarding agricultural protectionism.

-Colombia and Peru are at the top of the list of nations with which the U.S. will initiate trade talks on a free trade agreement.

-A free trade agreement with South American nations is not as good as access to U.S. and Canadian markets.

-Having a good negotiating team is important.

Negatively disposed articles asserted that:

-A free trade agreement with the U.S. is a dilemma for Colombia. If we don't sign one, we will lose participation in the U.S. market available to other countries; if we do sign one, the benefits will not be as good as those with Europe, including free migration and agricultural subsidies.

-Colombia loses sovereignty under a free trade agreement with the U.S. Compromises will have to be made on a variety of issues, including trade conflict resolution.

-A free trade agreement with the U.S. will have a negative impact on Colombia's incipient industry. There will be an avalanche of U.S. goods. Turning our back on South American nations may lead the Colombian economy to disaster.

-The U.S. and Europe let down the poor nations at the Cancun Conference.

FARC violence, AUC talks, Demobilization of paramilitaries

16. In this time frame, 19 articles dealt with the demobilization of paramilitaries, FARC violence, and human rights issues as discrete topics. Seventeen were positive, although some with reservations, and two were negative.

Positively disposed articles asserted that:

-To condemn the demobilization of paramilitaries before it is completed is unjust and wrong.

-A culture inside the Colombian Armed Forces has come together to observe human rights and international humanitarian law.

-The Colombian authorities have no doubts the FARC is responsible for the bombing in the Zona Rosa of Bogota.

-The Colombian Armed Forces have succeeded in the fight against terrorism and kidnapping, as a result of a combination of changes in strategy and improved intelligence. A stronger armed forces is the result of modernization and an increased military budget.

-The Mexico OAS Conference on Security Declaration is particularly important to Colombia. The governments of 34 American States call upon the FARC, the ELN, and self-defense groups to stop violence and enter peace talks.

-The decision to fight terrorism in the jungle is positive.

-The important questions on conditional liberty legislation asked by the U.S. send a clear message: more debate on the topic is required in order to prevent the failure of the incipient peace talks with self-defense groups.

-The image presented to the world by President Uribe in the UNGA and Washington on human rights was a successful effort.

-We are not against peace talks with the paramilitaries. A balance must be struck between what the Colombian Government is offering and what they are willing to give up.

-We are concerned that peace talks with the paramilitaries will allow drug traffickers to be part of the list of those demobilized.

-The conditional liberty legislation is faulty. It lacks consensus. Amnesty and pardons should be granted at the end rather than the beginning of the talks.

-The peace talks with the paramilitaries face difficulties and an atmosphere of uncertainty. The international public disagrees with the proposed conditional liberty legislation. Negatively disposed articles asserted that:

-The designated zone for peace talks with the paramilitaries in Medellin will become a problem.

-In contradiction of (the position of) the Government of the U.S., Congressman Cass Ballenger supports conditional liberty legislation.

#### Counter-narcotics/counter-insurgency

17. A total of 6 articles dealt with counter-narcotics and counter-insurgency policy. Five were positive and one was negative.

Positively disposed articles asserted that:

-With the appointment of a business leader as the new Minister of Interior and Justice, the Colombian President clearly is giving notice that money laundering and extradition remain law enforcement policy priorities.

-A Counterterrorism Act is very important to Colombia.

-In his remarks at the Civil-Military Relations Conference, U.S. Ambassador to Colombia William Wood was straightforward and concrete on the U.S. position against terrorist groups.

-International solidarity with Colombia against terrorism must reflect appropriate assistance. U.S. assistance already is there, and increasing, now through a free trade agreement. The Europeans mustn't be so naive with a few NGOs. The Europeans must cut the sources of financing of terrorist organizations.

-A drastic reduction in drug trafficking will weaken the guerillas by attacking their major source of income.

Negatively disposed article asserted that:

-An international agreement on drug legalization would lessen the damage caused by narcotics.

#### Miscellaneous articles

18. Thirty-two miscellaneous articles addressed topics such as U.S. reconstruction policy in Iraq, the U.S. role in the Mideast, the global campaign against terrorism, the Venezuelan situation, TPS for Colombians and the U.S. support for the referendum in Colombia. Twelve articles were positive and twenty-one were negative. Sixteen of the twenty-one negatively disposed articles concerned Iraq.

19. This report shows a decrease in the overall number of articles in the above categories from 107 in Summer 2003 to 88 in Fall 2003. (There were 182 articles in Spring 2003 and 91 articles in Winter 2002-2003.) Positive articles decreased from 59 to 54. (There were 42 positive articles in Spring 2003 and 21 positive articles in Winter 2002-2003.) Negative articles decreased from 48 to 34. (There were 126 negative articles in Spring 2003 and 58 negative articles in Winter 2002-2003.) As in Summer 2003, there were no neutral articles in this time frame. (There were 15 neutral articles in Spring 2003 and 12 neutral articles in Winter 2002-2003.)

There were no articles dealing with U.S. Military assistance to Colombia. (There were 8 positive articles in Summer 2003, one positive article in Spring 2003, and 2 positive articles in Winter 2002-2003. There were zero negative articles in Summer 2003, two negative articles in Spring 2003, and 6 negative articles in Winter 2002-2003.)

Five articles in this time frame dealt with eradication, the same number as in Summer 2003. (There were 6 articles in Spring 2003 and 5 articles in Winter 2002-2003) Positive articles decreased from 3 to two. (There was one in Spring 2003 and none in Winter 2002-2003.) The number of negative articles increased from 2 to 3. (There were 5 in Spring 2003 and 5 in Winter 2002-2003.)

There were no articles dealing with Plan Colombia. (There were 8 positive articles in Spring 2003 and one negative article in Winter 2002-2003)  
The number of articles dealing with trade issues decreased from 42 to 28. (There were 19 articles in Spring 2003 and 15 articles in Winter 2002-2003.) Positive articles decreased from 25 to 24. (There were 3 in Spring 2003 and 6 in Winter 2002-2003.) Negative articles decreased from 17 to 8. (There were 10 in Spring 2003 and 6 in Winter 2002-2003.)

Articles dealing with FARC violence and AUC talks increased from one to 19. Positive articles increased from 0 to 17. (There were no articles in Spring 2003 or in Winter 2002-2003). Negative articles increased from one to 2. (There were no articles in Spring 2003 and 12 articles in Winter 2002-2003.)

Articles dealing with counter-narcotics/counter-insurgency decreased from 13 to 6. (There were 8 articles in Spring 2003 and 5 articles in Winter 2002-2003.) Positive articles decreased from 7 to 5. (There were 3 articles in Spring 2003 and one article in Winter 2002-2003.) Negative articles decreased from 6 to one. (There were 5 articles in Spring 2003 and 3 articles in Winter 2002-2003.)

The number of articles dealing with miscellaneous topics was 32, the same number as Summer 2003. (There were 146 articles in Spring 2003 and 46 in Winter 2002-2003.)

Wood